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The Triumph of Yahwism

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THE religious situation in Judah and Jerusalem in the closing years of the kingdom is portrayed in the books of Jeremiah and Ezekiel. Jeremiah, after a sweeping indictment of the past, likens the nation of his time to a wild ass given over to the indulgence of desire, and adds that kings, priests, and prophets take stocks and stones for their gods, and that the gods in Judah are as numerous as the cities (2²³⁻²⁸); like a wife, he says, who is unfaithful to her husband, the House of Israel is unfaithful to Yahweh (3²⁰). These passages appear to have been written before the year 604. In a later passage (7¹⁷⁻¹⁸) he describes what was done in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem: "the children gather wood and the fathers kindle the fire and the women knead the dough to make cakes for the queen of heaven and to pour libations to other gods." It appears, also, if we may trust the account in 44¹⁵⁻¹⁹, that the cult of the queen of heaven was no mere passing fit of devotion—it had become almost the reigning cult: when, after the fall of the city, some of the people had gone down to Egypt, the women, backed by their husbands, stood up stoutly for their goddess against the prophet, and made an argument (exactly parallel to his argument for Yahweh) that doubtless seemed to them decisive: when, said they, we worshiped

the queen of heaven, as we and our fathers, our kings and our princes, had been in the habit of doing, we had plenty to eat and were in all respects well off, but since we have ceased to worship her, we have wanted all things and have been consumed by sword and famine. In 19⁴⁻⁵ human sacrifice, offered to Baal, is mentioned as an existing custom. Ezekiel's picture of the time agrees with that of Jeremiah. In chs. 6, 8, 14, 16, 23, he charges the whole nation with defection from Yahweh: the mountains of Israel are seats of sun-worship and other idolatrous cults (6); Jerusalem has adopted the religious rites of Assyria and Chaldea (16, 23); in the temple itself the elders of Israel worship the sun and all manner of idols, and the women practice the cult of Tammuz (8); in the Babylonian colony, also, the elders and others are idol-worshippers (14¹⁻⁵). The religious guides of the people, the priests and the prophets, are included in this condemnation (so also Jer. 8¹⁻³).

There is no good reason for doubting the substantial accuracy of these descriptions. The passages cited above, with the possible exception of Jer. 44¹⁵⁻¹⁹, are generally held to belong to the period of the two prophets, and this latter passage may be omitted without seriously affecting the picture. If the picture be a faithful one, it follows that Yahwism was not the predominant cult of the people at that time. It was in a sort acknowledged as the official national cult. But the people, while they frequented the temple of Yahweh to procure his favor, yet thought it no wrong to worship other gods (Jer. 7⁴⁻¹¹); the prophet's declaration that they were unfaithful to Yahweh, and that this temple might perish like the shrine of Shiloh, was violently resented, and the mob, including the priests and the prophets, seized him with the intention of putting him to death (26⁸⁻⁹).¹ There was, doubtless, a strong Yahweh party; but it consisted chiefly of the Jerusalem priests and the better sort of prophets, elders, and princes (26¹⁰⁻²⁴); the mass of the people were more attracted by Canaanite, Assyrian, and Babylonian cults, which offered a rich and visible form foreign to the severe

¹ Probably the affair at Anathoth (Jer. 11²¹) was similar to this.

meagerness of the traditional nomadic worship of Yahweh. The queen of heaven and the mourning for Tammuz appealed to the women, and the images, the visible embodiments of the deity, to all the people.

In regard to the condition of things during the reigns of Josiah and Manasseh we have material in Zephaniah, Kings, and Deuteronomy. All these bear witness to the prevalence of the worship of foreign deities. Zephaniah (whose first chapter belongs somewhere in Josiah's reign) speaks of astral, Baal, and Melek cults as then practiced, and denounces priests of Yahweh, priests (*kemarin*) of other gods, princes, and members of the royal house (1⁴⁻⁸). This agrees in general with the description given in 2 K. 23, according to which in the year 622 idolatrous shrines had been established by royal authority in the cities of Judah, incense was burned to Baal and to heavenly bodies, in the temple-area were horses and chariots consecrated to the sun, and near Jerusalem the highplaces built by Solomon for the worship of various foreign deities still stood. The defection here attributed mainly to the kings is affirmed in 22^{16, 17} of the nation. This relates to the time of Manasseh, who, according to the record (2 K. 21, cf. Jer. 15⁴), adopted and introduced the Assyrian worship almost bodily. This procedure, in view of the military prestige and cultic splendor of Assyria, was perfectly natural, and involved no abandonment of Yahweh. It was not a change of gods, but an enlargement of the sphere of worship, a naïve syncretism (not uncommon in religions not highly organized) that doubtless made the people more rather than less religious. There is no report of any protest against the king's action by priests and prophets of the time,² nor is there any evidence that he ceased to worship Yahweh. His object in placing images and symbols of Assyrian deities in the temple was neither to disown the national god (which is inconceivable for that time) nor to assert his preëminence over the others (of which there is no hint), but to do honor to the brilliant strangers and secure their protection, and perhaps

² If Mic. 6 belong here, its silence respecting Assyrian cults is noteworthy.

to gain favor in the eyes of his suzerain, the king of Assyria. Obviously he had not grasped or did not accept the idea that only one god should be worshiped; and it is not likely that the people, who seem to have adopted his large scheme generally, held any other theory respecting monolatry.³ The foreign cult, according to the accounts, held sway over all the land, and the worship of Yahweh, though it did not cease, occupied a subordinate position. It was, however, stoutly maintained by a section of priests and prophets and their adherents among the people.⁴ The protests of the book of Deuteronomy against polytheism (32¹⁵⁻¹⁸ 13, 18¹⁰ 57. 8 74. 5 27¹⁵) bear witness to its prevalence, but also to the steady opposition made to it by a vigorous circle. Josiah is said to have undone the work of Manasseh. But though there is no reason to doubt that the description, in 2 K. 23, of his drastic proceedings is correct, there is no evidence that these had any permanent effect on the manners of the people at large. Of the religious condition in Judah between the date of the reformation (622) and the death of Josiah (609-8) we have no immediate information. It is not improbable that foreign worship was crushed for a time — the women in Jer. 44¹⁸ speak of having ceased to burn incense to the queen of heaven, and in 2 Chr. 35²⁵ Jeremiah is said to have composed an elegy on the king. But in any case the effect of Josiah's movement was brief and superficial; in the days of Jeremiah and Ezekiel the situation was as bad as could be. The reformation was suggested and carried on by a small Yahweh party, and doubtless sustained by the king as long as he lived; but on his death the great body of the people fell back by natural inertia into their accustomed way, which was polytheistic. During the last century of the kingdom (686-586) Yahwism, far from being dominant among the people, was struggling to maintain itself against formidable rivals.

³ It was held, even by advanced thinkers, that the various gods had been assigned by Yahweh to the different nations (Dt. 4¹⁹. 20 32⁸. 9, revised text).

⁴ It may perhaps be inferred from Jer. 35¹⁹ that the Rechabites were staunch supporters of Yahwism at this time.

Hezekiah is credited (2 K. 18⁴) with a movement of reform similar to that of Josiah, only of smaller proportions. Assyrian religious influence had not yet made itself felt — the cultic abuse that he opposed was the worship at the various shrines, with their sacred pillars and posts, and the worship of the bronze serpent. This serpent figure, the editor of Kings remarks, was made by Moses — an indication that the cult reached far back, though nothing is said of it elsewhere; what its relation to Yahweh was is uncertain. Here again there is no ground to doubt that Hezekiah's reformation was real as far as it went (cf. 2 K. 18²²). That its results did not last long (except in the case of the bronze serpent, which he destroyed) we know from the succeeding history. The only available testimony is that of contemporary prophets, and, if Hezekiah ascended the throne in the year 715,⁵ the only contemporary prophetic utterances are those contained in certain chapters of Isaiah (1, 10⁵⁻³² 14²⁴⁻³² 18, 20, 22, 28⁷⁻¹³, 29¹⁻¹⁴ 30¹⁻¹⁷ 31) in none of which is there a word concerning the worship of other gods than Yahweh, except, perhaps, in 31⁷ and in a reference (10¹¹) to the idols of Jerusalem put into the mouth of the king of Assyria; but the authenticity of this verse is doubtful. The silence of these chapters on this point may mean that foreign cults were suppressed. Hezekiah, it seems, had broken up the rural shrines, and it would be easy to control the worship in Jerusalem. In this movement, doubtless, we must recognize the hand of the Yahwist party — Isaiah seems to have interested himself in affairs of state and to have had great influence with the king. The history of Hezekiah and Josiah shows what results might follow when the Yahwist leaders were able to get control of the government: there would be a momentary predominance of the Yahweh cult, succeeded by a return of the popular mind to its natural attitude of indifference or unreflecting eclecticism. The reverses of the nation, attributed by the prophets to Yahweh's displeasure, were supposed by the people to show the power of foreign

⁵ So 2 K. 18¹³, and this date suits the conditions better than the date 726, derived from 2 K. 18¹.

deities. Men, as a rule, worship the god that seems most able to help them.

Whatever be Hezekiah's date, we have testimony in Isaiah (2⁶⁻⁸ 7¹⁰⁻¹²), 2 Kings (16^{3, 4}), and perhaps Micah (1⁵) as to the religious condition in Judah between the years 735 and 721. Under Ahaz the highplaces were kept up and sacrifice of children was practiced; both these cults probably involved the worship of foreign deities. Sacrifice of firstborn children may have been an old Israelite custom; but the old custom seems to have passed away (Ex. 13^{12, 13}) and the new cult was of Canaanite origin. The details of the worship at the local shrines (highplaces) are not given in the Old Testament; but it seems certain that they were devoted both to Yahweh (2 K. 18²²) and to other deities (Ezek. 6, Hos. 2); probably the people did not distinguish sharply between gods. The idols, also, mentioned in Isa. 2⁸, may have included images of Yahweh as well as of other deities; the emphatic and repeated prohibitions of the making of Yahweh images (in the decalogue, interpreted by Dt. 4¹²) indicate that the practice existed in the eighth century. Yahweh-worship was, of course, general—the proper names of the time bear witness to that—but it was only one of a number of popular cults. Philistine influence appears at this time (Is. 2⁶). It is mentioned only in connection with the practice of magic, but this involved the worship of certain gods. In general the feeling of the prophets Isaiah and Micah is that the nation has forsaken Yahweh; the indictment relates largely to moral conduct, but, from Is. 2^{6, 8}, must also include cultic defection, as they regarded it; more properly stated it was childlike devotion to all the gods that they were intimately acquainted with.

Religious affairs in the Northern Kingdom from Jeroboam I to the fall of Samaria are described in Amos, Hosea, Micah, and Kings. Amos denounces the shrines of Bethel, Dan, and Gilgal, but gives no details of the worship there. The book of Hosea is more explicit: ch. 2 declares that the worship of the local Canaanite deities was universal—this, in the writer's mind, means an abandonment of Yahweh,

yet clearly Yahweh was one of the deities worshiped, a baal (vs.¹⁶), though others, it seems, were more resorted to; the same thing is said substantially in ch. 3; in the second part of the book the shrines of Gilgal, Bethel, and Samaria are denounced, and apparently those of Mizpah, Tabor, Gilead, and Shechem (5¹ 6^{8.9}), and there is a definite polemic against the bull-worship (8⁶ 10⁵), to which also there is probably a reference in Am. 8¹⁴. This worship seems not to have been regarded as anti-Yahwistic before the time of Amos, for Elijah and Jehu are not said to have opposed it; the increasing ethical clearness and opposition to images on the part of the great Yahwist leaders will account naturally for this new movement in the eighth century. The bull-worship became the national cult of the Northern Kingdom, was developed by Omri and Ahab (1 K. 16^{25.30}) and continued to the end, but it seems not to signify lack of devotion to Yahweh.⁶ The general indictment of the Northern Kingdom is contained in a late section in the book of Kings (2 K. 17¹⁰⁻¹⁷), wherein it is charged with both baalism and astralism. Whether the former refers to baal-cults in general or only to the Tyrian cult of Jezebel it is not easy to say; neither baal-worship nor star-worship is elsewhere mentioned in this period, except that it is said that Ahaziah sent to consult the Philistine Baalzebub (2 K. 1). But this latter incident makes it probable that local gods were worshiped, though the interest of the later (Judæan) editors was almost entirely fixed on the bull-cult, which naturally appeared to them a more formidable attack on Yahweh. There is no mention of any contemporary protests by Yahwists till the introduction of the Tyrian worship. This was so flagrantly anti-national that it aroused the opposition of the national party, and the foreign cult was crushed by Jehu.

⁶ Probably Jeroboam meant his bulls to represent Yahweh. True the authenticity of the second half of 1 K. 12²⁸ is doubtful—the tradition of the exodus is not mentioned elsewhere before the time of Amos, and we do not know when it took shape. But there is no hint in the Old Testament that the bulls represented a foreign god, and we know of no Israelite god but Yahweh. The Dan shrine, adopted by Jeroboam, seems to have been Yahwist from an early time (Judg. 18).

It lasted only about a generation, but seems to have been generally accepted by the people (1 K. 19¹⁸).

In the Southern Kingdom, from Solomon to Hezekiah, the record is one of practically continuous non-Yahwistic cults; and the reform of Hezekiah, extending over less than a generation, had hardly any observable permanent effect. Foreign worships are noted in the times of Solomon (1 K. 11⁵⁻⁸), Rehoboam (14²²⁻²⁴), Asa (15¹²⁻¹⁴), Jehoshaphat (22⁴³), Jehoram (2 K. 8¹⁸), Ahaziah (8²⁷), Jehoash (12³), Amaziah (14⁴), Azariah (15⁴), Jotham (15³⁵), Ahaz (16³⁻⁴). Many of the notices refer to highplaces; but it is probable that these shrines involved worship of local baals along with that of Yahweh. It is not said that Ahaz's new altar, fashioned after that of Damascus (2 K. 16), brought in any element of foreign worship; but the fact that Isaiah's friend Urijah (Is. 8²) was charged with its erection shows what freedom the king allowed himself in the arrangement of the temple-cult. Ahaz's polite indifference to Isaiah's proposed sign from Yahweh (Is. 7¹²) was hardly due to his greater interest in other deities. But in any case it appears from the evidence that Yahwism was only one of a number of cults practiced in Judah during this period. No protest against this mingling of cults is recorded. It is mentioned that Asa removed the *kedeshim* and the idols that his fathers had made, and destroyed his mother's *mifleset*; and Jehoshaphat, it is said, continued his father's work (1 K. 22⁴³). As to the history of sacred prostitution in Israel we have no exact information; from Gen. 38²¹⁻²² 1 K. 14²⁴ Am. 27(?) Hos. 4¹³ Dt. 23¹⁷⁻¹⁸ we may perhaps infer that it continued to exist to the end of the seventh century, though it may not have come into prominence until the time of Manasseh. The precise nature of the *mifleset* is unknown; it was possibly connected with obscene worship. These were flagrant violations of custom, and their removal did not affect the general popular worship of other deities than Yahweh. This popular worship appears to have been sanctioned by custom (which was the determining authority) and goes back as far as Solomon.

Whatever the nature of David's religious movement (2 Sam. 6), it is evident from the succeeding history that it did not prevent heterolatry. Brought up in a pastoral community of Judah he would of course inherit the Yahwistic traditions and customs of that region. But he regarded the cult of Yahweh as belonging only to Yahweh's land, and took it as a matter of course that in another land he would worship other gods (1 Sam. 26¹⁹). It was not he that introduced Yahwism into Northern Israel; the tradition respecting the shrines of Shiloh and Dan (1 Sam. 1-6, Judg. 18) is too strong to permit such a supposition; we must suppose that some knowledge of Yahweh had come to the Joseph tribes at an earlier time. But Yahwism appears to have had its stronghold in Judah, and David was an ardent Yahwist. Doubtless a Yahwist party existed before he came to the throne—a party that held to the old nomadic tradition and was unfriendly to Canaanite customs. Thus the policy of Samuel and the "prophets" and other persons connected with him may be explained. Saul, whose military renown had made him king over the Joseph tribes, was doubtless a worshiper of Yahweh (as is indicated by the name of his son Jonathan), but not devoted enough to satisfy the extreme Yahwists, and Samuel cast his eye on the young Judæan warrior (1 Sam. 19¹⁸) whose fidelity was unquestionable. If we may accept the account of Samuel's anointing of David (1 Sam. 16) as a good tradition, the procedure is exactly parallel to the anointing of Jehu—it is the act of leaders who saw the necessity of having a vigorous and thoroughgoing Yahwist at the head of the government. Their expectations were to a certain extent fulfilled. The establishment of the Jerusalem shrine, together with the partial unification of the country, tended to diffuse and fix the conviction that Yahwism was the official national cult. Neither David's tabernacle nor Solomon's temple had any effect in restraining the worship at the rural shrines, which was not always worship of Yahweh; but they doubtless gave a certain *éclat* to the latter cult, especially in the South. Nor did the unification last long—it was in fact only skin-

deep, and the Northern Kingdom set up its own official ritual, which, however, seems to have been Yahwistic. The attachment to Yahweh was probably strong in the royal family of Judah owing to David's influence; royal names compounded with "Yahweh" are more numerous in the South than in the North.

Back of David and Saul lies the period of the judges, in which the history of Yahwism is obscure. Its close is distinguished by the rise of the nationalist Yahweh party, whose object was both political and religious—two sides that characterized it throughout. It was probably in silent process of formation for a considerable time, perhaps from the moment of the settlement in Canaan. Antagonism would naturally spring up between the rigid adherents of Yahweh and the Canaanite party—that is, the Canaanites and those who adopted Canaanite and other foreign cults. This antagonism continued in spite of the partial amalgamation of Yahweh and Baal: the Canaanite communities were gradually absorbed by the Israelites, and the title "Baal" was given in the early times to Yahweh (cf. the name of David's son Baalyada, 1 Chr. 14⁷, and so, probably, that of Saul's son Ishbaal, 1 Chr. 8³³); but the two cults remained side by side.

According to the prophetic writings the popular devotion to non-Yahwistic cults seems to have increased rather than diminished as the Israelites advanced in civilization. Yet the testimony goes to show that baalism was universal in the time of the judges. The summary of the religious history in Judg. 2¹¹⁻¹⁹ represents the people as alternating between Yahwism and baalism; but obviously the real situation that comes out between the lines is continuous addiction to Canaanite cults. The summary is late, in general of the Deuteronomic period; but the tradition it expresses is supported by other statements in the book. Gideon's ephod (8²⁷) set up in all innocence and widely resorted to in the central part of the North, apparently had nothing to do with Yahweh; and it is doubtful whether Micah's shrine was devoted to Yahweh before the Bethlehem priest came

to him (17¹³). The judges, as they are here depicted, were not men in whom one would look for cultic fastidiousness. Beyond doubt Yahweh worship existed in the North; but it is difficult to say how widely extended it was and how much stress was laid on it. For example, the author of Deborah's Song, a resident of the North and an ardent Yahwist, measures the devotion of the tribes to Yahweh by their readiness to fight the foreign foe; but it is obvious that participation in a battle was determined by local considerations, and is no indication of the extent of the popular worship of Yahweh. The description of Yahweh's coming from Edom (vss.^{4, 5}), if it belong to the original form of the poem, shows that the writer thought it well to insist on the non-Canaanite origin of the national deity—it suggests that the consciousness that he abode in Edom drew a dividing line between those who held to him and those who worshiped Canaanite gods. But, apart from the passage in question, the fact that Yahweh's proper or original abode was in Edom (or Horeb) was doubtless widely known.

There is only slight mention of Judah in the book of Judges; the tribe was perhaps isolated from the others, and this book consists mainly of traditions of the northern half of the land. The conquest of the South is curtly described in the first chapter, and besides this there is only the bare mention of a Levite (17, 18) who came up from Bethlehem to the Ephraimite highland; another Levite (19), who dwelt in Ephraim and married a wife in Bethlehem, may also have come from the latter place. As to the condition of religion in Judah there is no direct statement in Judges. It is perhaps to be included in the indictments of chs. 2 and 10, but this is not certain. However this may be, all the hints in the early records lead us to suppose that the people of the South would be especially devoted to the cult of Yahweh. Here dwelt Kenites (1¹⁶) of the tribe into which, according to one tradition, Moses married, whose god seems to have been Yahweh (Ex. 18^{10, 11}); and Moses' wife was of a priestly family. The early fortunes of Moses' tribe of Levi are involved in obscurity: after some unfor-

fortunate experience (Gen. 34), it appears, the tribe was scattered (Gen. 49⁷) and never succeeded in gaining territory. From Judg. 17 it may probably be inferred that some Levites lived in the district of Judah, and that they were specially connected with the cult of Yahweh. As Moses, in all probability, was closely related to the Kenites by marriage, and from them adopted the cult of Yahweh and introduced it into Israel, his tribe would naturally be regarded as ministrants of this cult; or it is, perhaps, better to say that Moses' tribe, affiliated with the Kenites in their home at Horeb, fell in with their worship. However this may be, the Levites were landless, and seem to have wandered about seeking dwelling-places. Carrying special knowledge of the details of the cult of Yahweh, they would be a sort of Yahweh missionaries, and would form a nucleus of a Yahweh party. With them would be associated all those persons who, for whatever reason, declined to adopt the worship of the Canaanite baals. As has already been remarked, we do not know precisely how or when the Joseph tribes came to the knowledge of Yahweh, or how the Yahweh cult spread through the land. But it may be assumed that in these early times it had no strong hold on the people, and was kept alive by a minority (Gideon is, perhaps, according to the tradition in Judg. 6, a strenuous Yahwist, yet, according to 8²⁷, free in cultic details).

This rapid review of the history indicates that down to about the middle of the sixth century Yahwism was not the prevailing popular worship in Israel. In every period for which there are records the testimony of prophets and historians is to the effect that non-Yahwistic cults were not only practiced by the masses and some of the leaders but were preferably followed. For the succeeding time down to the coming of Nehemiah there is little historical material. In the sixth century there are indistinct signs of indifference to Yahweh (Is. 42¹⁸⁻²⁰ 45⁹⁻¹³ 55² cf. 59) and later (perhaps in the fifth century) definite charges of addiction to foreign cults (Is. 57³⁻¹⁰ 65¹⁻⁵ 66³⁻⁴). For the community that built the second temple we have only the vague hint in Zech. 5⁵⁻¹¹,

in which "wickedness" (whether ethical or cultic is not said) is borne off from Jerusalem to the land of Shinar. From such statements we gather little or nothing concerning popular customs. The evidence goes to show that under Nehemiah the little Judæan community was definitely Yahwist⁷ and so continued; and the Samaritans and probably the Babylonian colony were in accord with it. The century 550-450 thus witnessed a noteworthy cultic evolution or reorganization — the final triumph of Yahweh in Israel.

For the explanation of the result we must assume, in the first place, a firm tradition of Yahwism as the national cult brought by the people from the wilderness into Canaan. This cult was substantially in the hands of the two dominant Israelite bodies, the Moses group (Levi and Judah) and the Joseph group,⁸ but doubtless spread over the whole Israelite territory. The nation, as a whole, seems never to have lost the consciousness of its national character, though at times this consciousness was obscured or deadened. Other cults attracted the people, but none of them had the stamp of Israelite nationality. It is out of national traditions that national life is developed.

In the next place, the records bear witness to a constant struggle between this native cult and its foreign neighbors. The antagonism was at first purely social, not ethical, and not based on religious convictions. The people never held that Yahweh was the only god in existence, or that he was morally or physically superior to other gods. They shared the opinion, common among undeveloped communities, that a god was to be valued according to his performance;⁹ in this

⁷ The practices mentioned in Zech. 10² 13² do not disprove this general statement. The existence of other gods continued to be recognized (Ps. 58. 82).

⁸ Gad, Asher, Reuben, and Simeon may be left out of the account as unimportant. Dan appears to have received Yahwism from Levi. Issachar, Zebulun, and Naphtali were probably attached to Ephraim; they have little prominence. The Judah tribe was a conglomeration, in which Kenites, Kenizzites, and related clans are found — all originally nomads of the districts south of Canaan.

⁹ The appeals of the prophets on behalf of Yahweh are based largely on what he has done for his people.

regard there is a fine eclecticism among half-civilized tribes. The loosely held traditional reverence for the national deity was not strong enough to prevent recurrence to other deities, particularly in those places in which there came about a fusion of Israelite and Canaanite inhabitants. It was only a small minority that was so strongly attached to Yahweh as to be proof against the seductions of outside cults. There are indications (in Judges, as is pointed out above) that this Yahweh party was in existence at a very early time, but it took shape only under the pressure of peculiarly adverse circumstances. The antagonism of cults was at first unformulated, hardly conscious. It began to become conscious when the national spirit was aroused, in the time of Samuel and Saul, by the fear of permanent foreign domination — political nationalism and religious nationalism united, as, in fact, they were at bottom one. The records of this early religious movement are brief and fragmentary, but there are indications that it was at first connected with the old nomadic tradition. Samuel is said to have been a Nazirite (Samson is too vague a figure to be cited), David was of the Judæan wilderness, Elijah was of the eastern steppe, Amos was a herdsman. Later prophets (Hos. 2, Is. 7) recur to the wilderness as the scene of the nation's purer religious life. It was the recollection of Yahweh as a wilderness deity. The Rechabites also, flitting and undefined as they are, belong in this category. This memory of the non-Canaanite origin of the national cult was powerful enough to band together a certain number of persons, and it was their zeal that kept Yahwism alive through the troubled years when the whole nation, kings, princes, elders, people, seemed to have gone over to the service of foreign gods. This minority represented the genius of the Israelite people — the instinct of devotion to one deity.¹⁰ After a while the party produced a succession of great thinkers who, holding fast to the claim of the national god to be worshiped alone, looked away from nomadism, and created an ethical type of religion.

¹⁰ Renan's famous characterization of the Semitic theistic instinct would be substantially true if instead of "monotheism" he had said "monolatry."

It is not the first time that the true spirit of a people has been embodied in a minority which has fought its way to recognition. What the other party thought and did we can only guess. The Old Testament was written by devoted Yahwists who have no mercy on their opponents; these latter have no showing, and the real history of Ahab, Ahaz, Manasseh, and the "false prophets" might put things in a different light. Be this as it may, it is certain that our prophets represent the true Israel.

But the prophets, with all their splendid hopefulness and courage, seemed to be carrying on a losing fight—at the fall of Jerusalem the situation was not encouraging. It is, in fact, doubtful what the issue would have been but for the political conditions that put the control of the Judæan remnant into the hands of Yahwists and perhaps other nationalists. The leaders on the other side were in exile, the old seductive neighbor cults were crushed by the Persians, and the new rulers of the Jews were not image-worshippers and were almost monotheistic. Something, no doubt, must be credited to the general advance of thought—the Jews began to feel the intellectual influence of a larger world. All these conditions combined to set Yahwistic monolatry on a firm foundation, from which it was not destined to be moved.

The triumph of Yahweh was brought about by the vigor and determination of a minority of the Jewish people, seconded at the last by fortunate social circumstances. The ethical power of the Yahwist cult came to it through the ethical clear-sightedness of its adherents. The moral development was an affair of time: in the beginning the morals of the cult were those of a half-civilized people—then there was an advance to the elementary rules of the decalogue, and to the broader morality of the prophets, and finally to the greater depth and refinement of later law-books (Deut., Lev. 19) and of Job, Proverbs, Psalms, and certain non-canonical writings (Ben-Sira, Wisdom of Solomon, Tobit). No cult, simply as a cult, has any inherent ethical power—it is always ethically what its founders and adherents make

it. Nor was there any peculiar moral element resident in the way in which the Israelite tribes adopted the worship of Yahweh. If, indeed, it could be supposed that their adoption of it was by formal national free choice, this fact would probably give enthusiasm and persistence to their devotion. But such a method of adoption would be unexampled in the history of early tribes, and there is nothing in the records to prove it. Ex. 18 cannot be regarded as more reliable in details than the rest of the exodus story. The historical kernel of the description in Ex. 18 is some connection between Israelite Yahwism and the tribe of Jethro; but a formal public meeting and vote for Yahwism seems to be in the highest degree improbable.¹¹ It is by social intercourse that a cult goes from one early community to another (in this way the Israelites fell into baalism); and so, probably, Yahwism came to Israel. We must, no doubt, recognize a peculiar vigor and stanchness in the original adherents of Yahweh—such stanchness is a characteristic of the Jewish people, and is sufficient to account for the persistence of the national worship. The later ethical character of the cult may be regarded as contained implicitly in the earliest form in the sense in which every result is implicit in its beginning.

The maintenance and development of a national faith by a minority is not a phenomenon peculiar to Israelite history. The Greek national religion had its real expression in the poets and philosophers of the sixth, fifth, and fourth centuries B.C.; but the circumstances were such that this highest form did not penetrate the masses. China, India, and Egypt went through similar experiences. Medieval Christianity, which was the old Germanic heathenism with a veneer of Christian terms, owed its purification to a few persons, and the European masses are still heathen. The peculiarity of the Jewish history is that it was possible to isolate and train the better element of the people.

¹¹ Similarly the tradition of the prowess of Levi (Ex. 32, Deut. 33^{8, 9}) is not historical.